

On the Variation in the Myths of “The Origin of the Rigvedic Deities”

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Since the pre-rigvedic time, the Rishis / the Priests believed that the various natural forces existing in Nature do control the activities of the world, and man has no say in them. For years together, they would have keenly observed, identified different natural activities, and then named each activity as the act of the different Deity/God. They firmly believed that the Gods regularly uphold the rules framed by Nature (cosmic laws), and it is the demonic characters who break them at their will. Surprisingly, the Rishis have termed both the Gods and the Devils as the “**Asuras**”, to project them as the “Naturally Gifted Characters”. Basically, all Rigvedic Gods are the brain-children of the Priests. But all the Deities that are found in the **Ten Mandalas of Rigved** have not been evolved simultaneously. There is enough evidence available in **Rigved**, clearly indicating that some Deities were shaped earlier than the others and the **Adityas** belong to the first category.

A. Aditi and the Adityas

Many rigvedic scholars believe that the **Adityas** mentioned in the document are from the first batch of fabrication of Gods. The regular myth that makes the rounds in the **Rigvedic** text is, these Gods are born to mother **Aditi**, and hence collectively called as **Adityas**.

Rigvedic Sanskrit word, “**Aditi**” basically means “Boundless” or “Limitless”. Practically speaking, the character “**Aditi**” actually represents an “**Infinite Imaginativeness**” of the Rishis. **Aditi** means “Divine Mother”/the First Feminine Deity, who has given birth to all the Natural Powers /the Gods to run the show of the Universe.

Some Vedic Scholars even call **her** as the personification of the sky and space, wherein, all her children reside. Being motherly character, in some rigvedic verses, **Aditi** has been requested to protect all those who worship her, and provide wealth, safety, and abundance to all.

Information about the “Origin of the Rigvedic Gods” is found in the many hymns of the different Mandalas, but there exists some variation in the thoughts of Poets. Some assorted verses that convey the Birth of Gods are discussed below.

Rv-10.72 addressed to The Gods, is the hymn that mystically deals with the origin of Gods.

Rv-10.72,4: Earth sprang from the Productive Power, the regions from the **earth** were born.

Daksha was born of **Aditi**, and **Aditi** was **Daksha's** Child.

Rv-10.72,5 : For **Aditi**, O **Daksa**, she who is thy **Daughter**, was brought forth.

After her were the blessed **Gods born** sharers of immortal life.

Rv-10.72,8 : Eight are the Sons of Aditi who from her body sprang to life.

With seven she went to meet the Gods she cast **Martanda** far away.

Rv-10.72,9 : So with her Seven Sons **Aditi** went forth to meet the earlier age.

She brought **Martanda** thitherward to spring to life and die again.

#--symbol denotes **Griffith Translation**

Interpretation of the verses Rv-10.72,4, and Rv-10.72,5 :

Rv-10.72,4: From some unknown Productive Force, first the Earth/Material World came into existence. After that, the life granting **Aditi** took the birth. Then **Daksha** is born to **Aditi**, and from **Daksha**, again **Aditi** is born.

Rv-10.72,5 : Here, **Aditi** (junior) is described as the **Daughter of Daksha**, then the **immortal Gods** are born to her.

Probably, **Aditi** in the verse **Rv-10.72,4** represents **the Celestial Mother, who is the cause of generation of the “conditions favourable to life” on the Earth (Srishti)**. Then, the birth of **Daksha** symbolizes necessity of the Masculine Character to create a new life. Birth of **Aditi** in the verse **Rv-10.72,5** probably indicates the advancement of the life cycle. Subsequently, the **Gods** are born to younger **Aditi (Divine Mother)**, only when the life cycle in the world gets established properly. Based on the verse **Rv-10.72,4**, the **Earth** can be taken as **Aditi**.

Generally speaking, though the Gods are the product of mental imagination of the Poets, still the Singers followed a proper logical sequence to bring them to the world through the **mind game**.

Interpretation of the verses Rv-10.72,8, and Rv-10.72,9 :

Rv-10.72,8 : In total, **Aditi** directly gives birth to **Eight sons**. Out of these, Seven get recognition as the immortal Gods immediately. But **Aditi's** eighth son, “**Martanda**”, has some problem (**Martanda-** Mortal Egg; not immortal like other seven), hence has been kept away from the main-

stream Gods.

Rv-10.72,9 : Now, **Aditi**, the daughter of **Daksha**, goes to meet **the Original Aditi** (mother of **Daksha**)/ the Oldest Form, with **her** seven sons to hand them over to **Infinite Aditi** who lives in Space/Antariksha. But her eighth son; **Martanda** is left in the world who daily completes cycle of Life and Death. It indirectly means, younger **Aditi** has been created just to give birth to the Gods.

Mystically, the Composer of the verses has explained the distinct origin of the **Sun God, (Martanda/Vivasvan)**. Even though **He** is also **Son of Aditi**, but not immortal as **Her Other Seven Sons** (who are also invisible), but the Egg-shape mortal Son daily comes to life in the morning, and disappears in the evening. It really means, **He** has to pass through the life and death cycle, like any other living-being. That is why, **Martanda** (the **Sun/ the visible character**, also called as **Aditya** in the **Legends**) has been illustrated as different from other Immortal Seven Sons of **Aditi (junior)**, who have been transferred to **Celestial Aditi (senior)**.

Now the fresh question arises, **who are the other seven sons of Aditi?**

No single verse exactly gives names of the all seven Adityas, and hence creates uncertainty. Following verse selected from the hymn dedicated to the **Adityas** does give six names.

Rv-2.27,1: These hymns that drop down fatness, with the ladle I ever offer to the Kings Adityas.

May **Mitra**, **Aryaman**, and **Bhaga** hear us, the mighty **Varuna**, **Daksa**, and **Amsa**.

Some verses from the Late Mandalas add confusion to the names of **Adityas**.

Rv-10.5,7 : Not Being, Being in the highest heaven, in **Aditi's** bosom and in **Daksa's birthplace**,

Is **Agni**, our first-born of Holy Order, the Milch-cow and the Bull in life's beginning.

As per the description given in the above verse, God **Agni** also gets qualified as the **Aditya** to have born in **Daksha's** place. Actually, it is the **Sun God** , believed to be present in the form of **Agni** on the Earth.

In the verse, **Rv-8.52,7**; (Valakhilya Hymn), God **Indra** is highlighted as the **Forth Aditya**. Since beginning of the text, **Varuna**, **Mitra**, and **Aryaman** are the regularly featuring the **Three Adityas of Rigved**, who are clearly mentioned in the several verses of Different Mandalas. Here

Indra is shown to be junior to the trio. Since **Indra** is created very lately, and hence does not belong to the Group of **Original Eight Adityas**. This verse creates confusion about the intention of the Poet.

In the verse, **Rv-2.1,4**; four **Adityas** namely, **Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman**, and **Amsa** are placed together. Additionally, in the verse **Rv-2.1,7**; **Bhaga** and **Savitar** are shown together. If **Savitar** is treated as the **Sun God (Martanda of Rv-10.72,8)**, then the hymn **Rv-2.1**; which is considered as the starting point of the Rigvedic Composition also exhibits total **Six Adityas**. Still, this description does not provide answer to our question, names of all seven sons of **Aditi**.

The verses from the Last Mandala of **Rigved**; **Rv-10.132,6**; and **Rv-10.185,1** clearly identify **Aditi** (junior) as the mother of **Varuna, Mitra**, and **Aryaman**, the three famous **Celestial Gods**. It means, from the start to end of the Rigvedic literature, there is no ambiguity about the **three primary Adityas (Varuna, Mitra, and Aryaman)**, and the Composers of all the Mandalas continued the philosophical trend set by the Pre-rigvedic Rishi.

As the names of the **Sons of Aditi** mentioned in the different hymns of **Rigved**, do not match with each other, it is difficult to know excluding **Martanda**, who are the other **Seven Adityas** in the mind of the Composer of the verse **Rv-10.72,8**.

B. The Heaven and the Earth as the Parents of the Rigvedic Gods

In many verses of **Rigved**, the Poets have indicated that the Gods have born to **Father Heaven** and **Mother Earth**.

Hymn **Rv-7.53** dedicated to “**Heaven and Earth**” talks about the same thing.

Rv-7.53 hymn addressed to “Heaven and Earth” [Griffith Translation]

1. As priest with solemn rites and adorations I worship **Heaven and Earth**, the High and Holy.

To them, **great Parents of the Gods**, have sages of ancient time, singing, assigned precedence.

2. With newest hymns set in the seat of Order, those **the Two Parents, born before all others**,

Come, **Heaven and Earth**, with **the Celestial People**, hither to us, for strong is your protection.

3. Yea, **Heaven and Earth**, ye hold in your possession full many a treasure for the liberal giver.

Grant us that wealth which comes in free abundance. Preserve us evermore, ye **Gods**, with blessings.

Above hymn tells us that Heaven and Earth are the Universal Parents of all Gods.

The hymn from **Mandala-4; Rv-4.56** devoted to **Heaven and Earth** also project both of them as the parents of the Gods and the Goddesses.

Mandala-4 hymns **Rv-4.17 to 19** addressed to **Indra**, give better account of purpose of **His** birth. **Rv-4.17** shows Dyaus/Heaven as **Indra's Father**, and hymn **Rv-4.18** indirectly depicts **Earth** as **Mother** of **Indra**. In fact, the verse **Rv-4.18,12** talks about “**Indra making His Mother widow**”. Here, the question comes, how is it possible?

Minute observation of the complete hymn **Rv-4.18** indicates that, as soon as **Indra** is born, **He** grows infinite in shape and size (similar to **Vamana-avatara**, a Dashavatara story of **Vishnu**, wherein **Vamana** is shown to have grown in infinite size, when King **Bali** provides the former a place to keep **his** feet) or becomes mightier in all respects and occupies all the space available in the world including the Earth and the Heaven. As at the time of Birth, **Indra** is resting on Mother Earth, and as per the Poetic description, **His uncontrollable** or **violent** or **explosive growth** causes the Heaven (Father) to split open or burst into pieces instantaneously, from this angle, the Poet has mentioned that, as if, **New-born Indra** makes **his mother Widow**.

Probably, due to unconventional way of birth of **Indra** added by the devastation that occurs immediately after his birth, the Poet in the verse **Rv-4.18,4** speaks that, earlier no-one had born like **Him**, and in future also nobody would take birth similar to **Indra**.

The verse **Rv-10.65,8**; from the Last Mandala of **Rigved** does convey that the **Heaven** and the **Earth** are the parents of the Gods.

Rv-10. 65,8: Born in the oldest time, the Parents dwelling round are sharers of one mansion
in the home of Law.

Bound by their common vow **Dyaus, Prthivi** stream forth the moisture rich in
oil to **Varuna** the Steer.

In many mythologies of the world, **the Heaven** is depicted as **Father of the Gods**, and the **Earth** is described as their **Mother**.

It means to say that, although there exists some difference in the stories of Birth of the Rigvedic Deities, still with some variation, different Singers have tried to explain the myth in their style, and also reproduced the story in **Mandala-10 ; the Last Mandala of Rigved**.

In addition to above, in some hymns dedicated to **Brahmanaspati/Brihaspati**, like the **Heaven**, **He** too has been described as the **Father of the Gods**.

Rv-2.26,3: He with his folk, his house, his family, **his sons**, gains booty for himself, and, with the
heroes, wealth, believing

Who with oblation and a true heart serves **Brahmanaspati** the **Father of the Gods**.

Rv-4.50,6: Serve we with sacrifices, gifts, and homage even thus the Steer of **all the Gods**, the
Father.

Brhaspati, may we be lords of riches, with noble progeny and store of heroes

A fresh question surfaces, if **Brihaspati** is Father of the Gods, then **who is their mother** ?

Probably , the verses manifest the wordy creation of the Rigvedic Deities.

C. “Purusha” as the Originator of Some of the Rigvedic Gods

The hymn **Rv-10.90** of **Rigved**, is commonly known as **Purusha-Sukta/पुरुषसूक्तम्** that brings to us the different fictional story of the creation of many aspects of the Universe from One Masculine but infinite source. It is one of the most widely discussed hymns, comprises sixteen verses together, and gives sketchy idea about the birth of some selected Rigvedic Gods, some parts of worldly matter, the animals, as well as the origin of the four basic types of human beings (this aspect subsequently became the basis for the formation of **Four VarNas**/classes found in the Hindu religion/**Manu-smriti**).

Since in the present topic, we are discussing mainly about the “**Origin of Rigvedic Gods**”, hence the important features of the said hymn have been discussed in brief.

The hymn, **Rv-10.90** of the last Mandala of **Rigved**, opens up with the definition of the “**Param/Universal Purusha**” who has thousand Heads, thousand Eyes, thousand Feet, and wider than the Earth at least by ten fingers. In the first verse itself, in a poetic style, the Singer has given the status of “**Cosmic or Universal Man**” to a newly framed character, who has been projected as the “**Ultimate Creator**” of everything found in the world, including some real and some fictional characters.

Next three verses of Sukta, **2 to 4** tell us about the basic features such as size and location of this “**Bhavya-Purusha**”, it practically defines **His Domain of Work** or **Spread of Influence**.

But the beauty lies in the **verse number-5**, wherein we notice that original **Maha/Param-Purusha** first gives birth to **Viraj/Virat**, and then this freshly born **Vijat/Virat** further creates a new **Purusha**. This cycle of creation is very similar to the description available in the verse **Rv-10.72,4**; in which, a cyclic origin of “**Aditi-Daksha-Aditi**” have been reported.

The **verse-6** intimates us about origin of the three seasons namely, **Vasanta** (Spring), **Grishma** (Summer), and **Sharada** (Autumn).

In the **verse-7**, the activities of **Purusha** are equated with **Yajna/Sacrifice**. It actually means, to create a new thing, first something needs to be sacrificed. The Poet says that the human, the Sadhyas, the Rishis, all have been originated from **Yajna**.

Note: This aspect can be easily understood in the form of the “**First Law of Thermodynamics**”, which states that “**Energy can neither be created nor destroyed or If One form of Energy disappears, then Other takes its appearance**”. It is popularly known as the “**Law of the Nature**”. For example, Electricity is generated by burning Coal, or Gas or Uranium (Nuclear Reactor).

Then the basic question is, **what could “Yajna” of the verse Rv-10.90,7 mean?**

Since in the verse, the Poet substitutes **Purusha** as **Yajna** and vice versa as well, hence here **Yajna** means any action performed with full devotion and dedication for the cause of new creation.

The **verse-8** conveys that, only through the sacrificial procedure the Air, the different Animals are born.

Through the **verse-9**, the Poet informs us that, the spoken words in the form of **Mantras, Verses** etc are also born from the **Yajna** conducted by **Aadi-Purusha**.

The **verse-10** talks about the birth of the animals like horse, cattle, goat, sheep etc who have teeth in both jaws.

In the **verse-11**, the Singer, in the form of self-addressed questions, has taken a look at the Human Body. By focusing attention on the four external parts of the human body, (**Mouth, Two Arms, Two Thighs, and Two Feet**), the Poet tries to present **Purusha** as “**Man in Action**”, or highlights “**His Active Participation**” during the conduct of **Yajna**.

The **verse-12** describes the origin of four types of Persons from the four different parts of body of **Purusha** (relevant body-parts are already indicated in the verse number-11). It states that the **Brahmin** is born from the **Mouth** of **Purusha**; the **Kshatriya/Rajan** from the **Two**

Arms/Baahu; the **Vaishya** from the **Two Thighs**; and the **Shudra** from the **Two Feet**.

Here the fundamental question is “ **what does this classification manifest?**”

We shall discuss this aspect separately, but from different perspective.

The **verse-13** provides information on the birth of the selected Rigvedic Deities. The **Moon** is born from the **Mind** of **Purusha**, the **Sun** from **His Eyes**, **Indra** and **Agni** from **His Mouth**, and **Vayu** from **His Breath**. Please note that Moon, as God is not found in the Five Early Mandalas.

In the **verse-14**, the Composer says that from the **Naval** of **Purusha** the **Mid-space** is born, from **His Head** -the **Heaven**, from **His Feet** -the **Earth**, and all the **Directions** have come from **His Ears**.

The last two verses; **15** and **16** generally talk about the basic principle of **Yajna**. It means, to obtain a new thing, first already existing thing needs to be sacrificed (here **Purusha** is sacrificed to create the new entities). In modern context, it is nothing but “**Give and Take**” Policy. First Give or contribute, and then Achieve, one way similar to popular phrase “No Pain, No Gain” or “ Without Proper **Input**, do not expect Desired **Output**”

When the two verses; **Rv-10.90,12** and **14** are placed on a common platform, then we notice that, similar to birth of the **Shudra**, the **Earth** is also reported to have born from the **feet** of **Purusha**. Additionally, there exists similarity between the origin of the **Brahmin** and the **Heaven**, as both are described to have born from the **Head** portion of **Purusha**. Actually, we spend our life on the **Earth**, but when a person dies, then it is said that His/Her soul has gone to the **Heaven**. In reality, the plan of “the Heaven is superior to the Earth” is an imagination of Man.

In the **verse-7**, the Poet has mentioned that **Yajna** and **Purusha** are interchangeable. When the **verse-12** is seen from the **Yajna/Sacrifice ritual perspective**, then it indirectly hints at, the **Yajna** rite is being performed by a Person who chants Mantras (**Brahmin**, the Speaker), for a **Royal Person / King** who uses his both arms for giving oblation or offerings at the time of **Yajna**, the function is materially supported by a **Vaishya**, and the sundry or peripheral or labour work of **Yajna** is done by a man called **Shudra**.

A success of any major event largely depends on the allocation of the work to the persons having expertise in the different fields, as explained below.

1. Planner and Executor (**Brahmin**)
2. Performer or Actor (**Kshatriya**)

3. Logistic Support Provider (**Vaishya**)

4. Workers to do the spade-work (**Shudra**)

To simply the case of **Shudra** further, take an example from the Sports Field. Several Groundsmen work together to prepare and maintain the Grounds/Playfields used for playing the Field games like Football/Soccer, Base-ball, Cricket, Rugby, Golf, Tennis etc. The Groundsmen do not participate in the tournaments, but without their groundwork, the Sport events can not take place.

In short, from the **Yajna** point of view, the verse broadly defines the roles of four types of persons who are involved in **Yajna** ceremony. Hence, the verse should not be viewed as the permanent subdivision of the People based on their birth in a particular community, which is being purposely interpreted by many, just to highlight presence of discrimination or inequality in the social structure of the Hindu Religion since the Rigvedic Period. Yes, **Manu-smriti** composed many centuries after **Rigved**, does present work-based stratification of the Society, that finally led to caste based Social Structure.

To sum up the discussion about the “ **Origin of the Rigvedic Deities**”, the study of many relevant Rigvedic hymns/verses does show that there exists wide variation in the myths promoted by the different Composers. As a matter of fact, no single hymn/verse provides proper answer to the question of the names of **All Eight Sons of Aditi**. In some hymns, the **Heaven** has been designated as **Father** of all the Gods, and the **Earth** as their **Mother**. In some verses, **Brihaspati** is termed as the **Father** of all the Gods, then the question of their Mother remains unanswered.

Through **Purusha-sukta** hymn, the Poet proclaims that everything present in the world (including the Gods, Living and non-living things) has its origin in the **Sacrificial Purusha**, whose earlier form “**Param/Cosmic Purusha**”, has been treated as the **Creator of the Universe**.

Here the riddle is, When Goddess **Aditi** (a feminine character) earlier described as the **Mother** of the Rigvedic Deities, then how come **Purusha** (a masculine character as the Supreme Being) of the hymn **Rv-10.90** gets recognition as the **Creator** of the Gods and other things ?

Though the hymn **Rv-10.90** defines the **Cosmic Purusha** (Single, Masculine Character) as the **Creator of everything**, still the verses **Rv-10.132,6**; and **Rv-10.185,1** from the Last Mandala of **Rigved** do identify **Aditi** (feminine character) as the mother of the **Three Main Adityas**.

Based on the nature of the **Purusha-sukta** hymn, it can be said that, the **Rigvedic Poet** might have borrowed an idea of “**Purusha**” (the **Sole Masculine character as the conceiver of all the things**) from the **Avestan philosophy**, wherein **Pitre Asura/ Father Asura / Asura Medha/Ahura Mazda** is termed as the **Creator of Everything** present in the world. Hymn **Rv-10.124**, from the Last **Mandala** does manifest that at some point of time, the **Rigvedic People** came in contact with the **Avestan People**, when they lived in the Extreme North-west Corner of the Indian Sub-continent.

Why do the Hindus worship “Cow as the Goddess”?

Ans: Since inception of **Rigved**, we find that a Cow is very close to the heart of the Rigvedic Composers as it provides milk which is processed further to make Grita/Ghee; one of the essential ingredients used in Yajna/Sacrifice. In fact, in **Rigved**, two hymns are dedicated to this useful animal (**Rv-6.28; Rv-10.169**). Additionally, some experts believe that hymn **Rv-10.19** may be considered as devoted either to waters or cows (Griffith Trans.).

As per the Puranas/Legends, 33 Crores (330 Millions) Deities reside in the body of a holy Cow. Actually, in some verses of **Rigved**, we notice mention about 33 Gods by the Singers.

In the two different verses of the Late Mandalas of **Rigved**, that is, **Rv-1.153,3** ; and **Rv-8.101,15**; the Composers have portrayed “**Goddess Aditi as a Cow**”, and hence in the **Yajna rite** and some religious functions, **Cow; a sacred animal** is usually seen as **Aditi**. As per the Rigvedic literature, **Aditi** is the mother of the all Devatas/Gods.

Rv-1.153,3 : *O Mitra-Varuna, Aditi the Milch-cow streams for the rite, for folk who bring oblation,*

When in the assembly he who worships moves you, like to a human priest, with gifts presented.

Rv-8.101,15 : *The Rudras' Mother, Daughter of the Vasus, centre of nectar, the Adityas' Sister-*

To folk who understand will I proclaim it-injure not Aditi, the Cow, the sinless.

As the Rigvedic People believed that Goddess Aditi lives in Cow, probably due to this high degree of confidence, since ancient time, the Hindus worship Cow as the Goddess which

symbolises **Mother** (representing *Aditi and milk-feeder to all*), **Love, Kindness, Purity, and Bonding Nature**.

Hence, “Origin of Cow worship” can be easily traced to the Rigvedic text.

In the **Legends** composed subsequently, **Aditi** has been described as **Mother of All Gods**, and Rishi **Kashyapa** as their **Father**. Therefore, in the present context, **Cow** can be seen as the **Living Icon** of mythical Goddess **Aditi**.

References:

1. “Rig Veda”(Bilingual), Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith (1896) in PDF format
2. Monier-Williams Dictionary

“It is relatively easy to question someone's answer than answering his/her question.”